

Preventing Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Teen

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) includes a range of effects on a child that can occur when a mother drinks alcohol during pregnancy. Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) is the most severe form.

How can this condition affect my child?

Alcohol that a pregnant teen drinks can travel through the blood and cause a broad range of birth defects in the growing baby. Fetal alcohol syndrome affects each baby differently. It can cause:

- Learning disabilities, including:
 - Lack of attention.
 - Poor memory.
 - Poor judgment or impulsive behavior.
 - Speech and language delays.
- Behavior problems, which may include:
 - Inability to stay still or pay attention (*hyperactivity*).
 - Sleep problems.
- Problems with physical development, such as:
 - Abnormal facial features, such as a thin upper lip or smooth skin between the nose and lip.
 - Shorter than average height.
 - Small head size.
 - Low body weight.
 - Deformed limbs or fingers.
 - Poor coordination.
 - Difficulty sucking.
 - Problems with vision, hearing, heart function, or kidney function.
- Increased risk of other serious problems, such as:
 - Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).
 - Loss of pregnancy (*miscarriage*).
 - Giving birth to a lifeless baby (*stillbirth*).



Some children are born with little or no effects from alcohol exposure during pregnancy, while others are born with very serious defects. Damage caused to the baby by drinking alcohol during pregnancy is not reversible. There is no cure for FAS.

What actions can I take to prevent this syndrome?

Alcohol can affect your baby even before you know you are pregnant. **Do not** drink alcohol if:

- You are pregnant.
- You plan to become pregnant.
- You think you may be pregnant.

No amount of alcohol is safe to drink during pregnancy. There is also no safe time to drink alcohol during pregnancy. If you have been drinking during pregnancy, **stop immediately** to prevent more damage to your baby.



Resist pressure from your peers about drinking alcohol:

- If your friends drink, spend time with other friends who do not drink alcohol. Make new friends who do not use alcohol.
- Instead of drinking alcohol, do something else, like play a game, find a hobby, or get some exercise. Find activities that you can do with friends instead of drinking.
- **Do not** be afraid to say no if someone offers you alcohol. Speak up about why you do not want to drink. You can be a positive role model for your friends and set a good example for those around you by not drinking alcohol.

Where to find support

For more support on preventing FAS, or to stop drinking:

- Talk with your health care provider.
- Find treatment through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: findtreatment.samhsa.gov

For more support on coping with FAS, visit:

- The National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome support network for mothers: nofas.org
- The Kennedy Krieger Institute: kennedykrieger.org
- Your local public school system. Your local public school system may provide support services for children with FAS.

Where to find more information

Learn more about fetal alcohol syndrome from:

- American Academy of Pediatrics: aap.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: cdc.gov
- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists: acog.org
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: hhs.gov

Summary

- Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) includes a range of effects on a child that can occur when a mother drinks alcohol during pregnancy.
- Alcohol can harm your baby even before you know you are pregnant. **Do not** drink alcohol.
- There is no safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy. There is also no safe time in pregnancy to drink alcohol.
- If you have been drinking alcohol, stop drinking as soon as you know you are pregnant.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.